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THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

All communications should be addressed to ALEXANDER FULLERTON, BOX 2659, NEW YORK CITY.

For paragraphs under the word "Ans." the editor is personally responsible.

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QUESTION LXXXI.

If material life is illusionary, and if reality increases and becomes perfect only as life in the spirit is reached, how do you reconcile with these facts the teaching that Devachan, a state free from matter, is yet a complete illusion, its subjective joys having no objective actuality? Why call a deceptive state a reward; and why proportion the length of such a reward to the goodness of the soul receiving it; and why make unselfish labor for others the cause of a prolonged selfish enjoyment wherein no labor for others is possible?

C. I.—I ask these questions because Devachan appears to me an enormous period of lost time, frightening like a nightmare. The thought of all those hundreds of years passed without any advantage to oneself or others is really horrible to me, and I should prefer the worst trials in earthly lives in which I could make progress and help others, to such a waste of time passed in a happiness not remembered and only composed of illusion and untruth. Instead of reward, such a deceiving state would be to me the most severe punishment. Besides, it is just our very merits which keep us back from progressing, for as we only progress in earth-lives and not in Devachan, and as our

stay in Devachan will be the longer as the Karma made in our last life was better, our supposed reward consists in being deprived of the opportunity to hasten the attainment of our goal. Then again, our philosophy puts unselfishness as the first and highest duty, yet holds out as a reward a state (30 times longer than the period in which unselfishness can be practised) which is the very essence of egotism, and in which the enjoyment of the present moment will be our sole occupation, thus just the reverse of what we are taught to do in our lives. Will such a reward be forced upon us if we have such an innate repulsion to it?

Ans.—Postponing for a moment the question of illusion, the essence of the often-felt and perfectly just objection you state to Devachan as generally conceived is its duration. No one would think unreasonable *some* period of rest and refreshment for a soul just released from incarnation, perhaps from severe and long-continued suffering. Rather would it be unreasonable to ask it to resume its burden at once and without such rest and refreshment. Nor would any one oppose some period of assimilation and digestion of experience, of that unifying and solidifying of character which seems appropriate after the active elements contributing to it in material life have ended. Still less would it be opposed if the law of human evolution was known to require and prescribe it. Now that there is some such period is all that we are taught. The 1500 years in *Esoteric Buddhism* were not a disclosure to Mr. Sinnett by a Master, and are largely believed to have been a misapprehension. As the ends to be met by Devachan exact different times for different individuals, there can be no one time for all, hardly one time for two. Some are needed here or need to be here very soon, and therefore return quickly; to others a longer stay is fitting. But of one thing we may be entirely sure;—the perfect Wisdom which presides over all life, on earth or off it, and of which the all-pervading law of Karma is the expression, will no less regulate the proper length of Devachan than the proper length and quality of an incarnation, will secure its results in the best way, will avoid all waste of time or

strength, and will end Devachan at the precise hour and moment when its function shall have been accomplished. We should not wish it ended prematurely, any more than we should wish an incarnation ended prematurely. And we should not have faith in Karma for only while we have bodies.

Now as to the matter of illusion. Happiness is a state of the interior being, a condition of mind. It is proper for the Devachanee because it is of the essence of a restful and refreshing experience, because it is the Karmic adjustment of such unmerited sufferings as have been met in this inevitably complicated earth-life (see FORUM No. 11), and because Devachanic processes could not be carried on under conditions of pain. But happiness consists in the realization of personal ideals, largely those related to affection. So far as these ideals depend upon objects external to the mind, the realization can only take place if either the objects are actually present or else are believed to be present. Now the former case is impossible in Devachan, for the life is subjective, and not only are other Devachanees absent from touch, but must be, as otherwise it would only be earth-life over again. Take the case of affection. A parent's happiness is in association with his children. Yet those children cannot be *actually* present to the Devachanee, for they may be still living, and even if in Devachan, cannot have their own Devachanic experience sacrificed to the parent's. The alternative is that the objects shall be believed to be present. Take an illustration: Sight is produced by an impression on the brain conveyed to it by the optic nerve from a picture upon the retina from exterior things. But if exactly the same vibrations of the optic nerve were set up back of the retina as if by things in front of it, just the same effect of sight would be produced, and the subject be sure that he saw. If the Devachanee has the interior conviction of exterior objects, it is the same to him as if they were there. Hence, so far as the happiness to which he is entitled is conditioned upon exterior objects, he receives an impression of such objects equivalent to their actual, but impossible, presence. This is, no doubt, an illusion, *but there could be no happiness without that illusion.*

We see, therefore, that the illusions of Devachan are not an

invention of Theosophists, or even an arbitrary imposition by a Higher Power, but the inevitable result of the conditions in the case. But there is still the question, how this illusionary quality of Devachan is reconcilable with the teaching that illusion vanishes as spiritual states are reached. The answer is that a spiritual state is not merely a state from which matter is absent, but a state from which the consequences or influences of matter have vanished. A truly spiritual life is one freed from the carnal cares and feelings, the limitations, selfishness, prejudices, distorted affections caused by the flesh. Now the Devachanee is not a purely spiritual being, but is fresh from all the interests and experiences of an incarnation, soaked through and through with late feelings, still full of topics concerning his ideals while on earth. Death has not transformed him into an angel, however much it may have shorn him of his material nature. The fact that his happiness is made possible only through the channels he has known in his incarnation shows that he has not transcended all material interests. How far the ripening processes of Devachan may effect this, sublimating his tastes and introducing new and richer sources of enjoyment, we do not know. Yet something of this is probable, and we may well believe that memories can be transmuted into aspirations and aspirations receive no little fulfilment as the nature allows. Such a consideration would help, too, to solve the problem of time, for unselfish characters would ripen faster, complete the needful processes in less time, and be the sooner restored to the region where they can best serve others and most realize the object of being.

QUESTION LXXXII.

Was Madame Blavatsky's telegram of greeting to the Chicago Convention sent in the ordinary way?

Ans.—The FORUM will reply to this query seriously, sore as is the temptation to do otherwise. Taking it literally, the query answers itself, for a "telegram" must come by telegraph, and telegraphs do not send messages in other than "ordinary" ways. But the querist has evidently in mind the possibility of a

"precipitated" letter, or some other use of Occult powers suitable to an Adept.

So far as one can judge, Adepts employ their larger resources on the same principles as we employ the smaller ones in our possession. If there is no particular hurry, and if the mail is reasonably safe, we send a letter on business, and do not resort to the needless expense of a telegram. If a street-car will answer our wants, we do not waste money on a carriage. Our personal and domestic life is so conducted as to avail ourselves of all ordinary conveniences, and where gas and water and other needs are supplied satisfactorily we do not undertake separate and special agencies which would be superfluous. Nobody expends large sums of money when what he wants is as well accomplished by small sums. In emergencies, or for very special reasons, we evoke extraordinary agencies at extraordinary cost. And so, it would seem, do Adepts act. When the usual forces or provisions or resources are quite ample for the work in hand, they apply them and are content with them. When these are inadequate, or when some cogent reason justifies the use of Occult powers, then, and then only, are they used.

For it must not be overlooked that every employment of extraordinary power involves an extraordinary outlay of strength. The concentration of thought, the adjustment of force-centres, the exercise of intensified will require large nervous and other expenditure, and an Adept cannot be prodigal of his resources any more than we can. There are indications through several standard works that the production of phenomena entails no little drain of energy, and it is understood that Madame Blavatsky's enfeebled health of late years has had effects in the diminution of her powers in this department. These facts all point to a wise economy in the use of such prerogatives, and show that wisdom and self-restraint rule there as in all other acts of Masters.

It is quite natural for a person fresh to the conception of Adepts to suppose that they lead a wholly independent life, using phenomenal powers as profusely as we use our feeble ones, drawing at will on the Astral World and the world of sense, quite unlimited as to resources, and in no wise fettered by other

considerations than discretion. But this must be an error. All their magical acts are under law no less than through law, respect the fitness of things, consult the exigencies of the case, interfere as little as possible with the normal order. Perhaps it may not be too much to say that Their use of phenomenal power is exceptional, rather reserved for emergencies than an everyday habit. This is all the more likely when we remember the certainty of wide-spreading effects from any interference with the usual working of affairs, a certainty far more evident to Them than to us. Such powers are a trust, not a possession, and can only be employed for the purposes of the trust. Nature would be disorganized, imperilled, if incessantly and needlessly interrupted and overruled.

When Madame Blavatsky needed to communicate with the Chicago Convention, she did not dispatch an Elemental, or precipitate in the Palmer House a message on a telegraph blank, but quietly wrote what she had to say, sent it to the nearest station, paid the customary charges, and entrusted her despatch to the Cable Co. just as anybody else would. It went almost as rapidly, cost much less in effort and fatigue, and was equally as effective. When Initiates reach the point of being able to dispense with telegraphs, they have reached the point of not wishing to dispense with them needlessly.

QUESTION LXXXIII.

We are told by some Theosophical writers that in perfect self-command we are no longer moved by the emotions. To some persons Music has the effect of elevating to high emotional states, seemingly with most benignant and pure aspirations. I myself am thus affected. Are such emotions to be superseded by a higher and more rational state?

Ans.—It is quite true that in perfect self-command we are no longer moved (swayed, rather) by the emotions, but this is because the self-command extends over the emotions as well as over the other faculties, not at all because the emotions are extirpated. All the faculties given by Nature are given for legitimate use, not for suppression. Man is composite, and in each section of

his being are the forces needed to function there, the final cause of his disciplinary career being that these shall all be made harmonious, regulated, subordinate to the control of intelligent will. The emotional section is one of the most important, not only as containing some of his choicest and tenderest endowments, but because these constitute the impulse to many of his noblest acts. The heroisms of history had their spring in patriotism, affection for friends and relatives, or general philanthropy. The danger to all men is that the great force of feeling overmasters the working of reason, coloring or obscuring facts, exciting partiality, producing one-sidedness or injustice or precipitancy. All this has to be corrected in the ideal man. His emotions have to be purged of the selfish element which makes them play unequally, and so related to the judgment that they shall inspire it without deflecting it; and they have also to be tamed when too dominant, or nourished when too feeble. The judgment has also, of course, to be trained, and, in general, the whole being so disciplined that it is moved by no pressure from sophistry or illusion, prejudice, prepossession, excitement, or distaste. Yet the emotions will always have their function. The ideal man could not be destitute of pity, love, sympathy, or indignation. Only they will not rule him: he will rule them.

Music is a good example. It undoubtedly has the effect described in the Question, and the exalted moods it can produce belong to that peculiarly rich sphere of emotion which is one of the possessions of higher natures. Sensitiveness to melody or harmony expressing ethereal ideas is perhaps a finer gift than responsiveness to spoken thought: it is certainly more delicate, more transcendental, less conditioned on the mechanism essential to verbal precision, and it releases feeling from the need to follow only definite conceptions consciously apprehended. The refinement and subtlety of the emotion caused by music show it to belong to the possessions of the higher nature, and not a mere consequent on the auditory nerve. The latter is only the usual channel by which at present it is transmitted to the soul. But a loftier state of being would only dispense with the channel: the psychical content would continue, indeed be enlarged, for it could overpass physical conditions or limitations. In the re-

sources of Nature there may very well be musical effects enormously transcending all capabilities of human orchestras or vocalism, and thus the susceptibilities of the soul be correspondingly increased. If we are uplifted and ennobled by expressive music here, much more, one may say, when both we and the music are transported to higher planes.

It is probably a mistake to suppose that evolution hereafter is to be solely in the direction of reason. It has not been heretofore. Rather should we expect an expansion of our composite nature on all lines. That this should not occur to an unreasonable extent on any one is obvious, and, proportion being a dictate of reason, reason may in this bearing be considered the paramount faculty. Well would it be for us if it regulated our loves and tastes here! But sentiment, which is at the root of loves and tastes, must grow, and its future fruitage will doubtless be as much richer and more diversified than this as will be the intellectual range. Added faculties, too, will create new experiences of which we now have no imagination, just as the gifts of hearing and speech to a deaf-mute open wholly new worlds to him. The need to combine and synthesize the whole possession will evoke fresh discipline and fresh power, the process of acquirement and assimilation being apparently endless. Thus we shall ever be rising to higher and—in one sense—more "rational" states, though not at all by the suppression of any department of being or the sole exaltation of any one. This, indeed, is the duty now, though our natural tendency towards act or opinion through the prompting of ill-proportioned sentiment forces one desirous of judicious self-training to some special guard over prejudice or precipitancy. And to this, music is often an efficient help, for it wakens up subtle emotions, raises to transcendental planes, gives visions of the unseen and the enduring, and sends a wholesome singfulness through the soul.

QUESTION LXXXIV.

1. *I should like the* FORUM'S *idea of what is meant in "Light on the Path" by "Obey him not as though he were a general, but as*

though he were thyself, and his spoken word were the source of thy secret desires."

2. *If one knows he fails in obeying him as though he were himself, yet obeys him as though he were a general, is not this better than carrying out a personal desire, even where the personal desire is right in itself?*

Ans. 1st.—The "him" here spoken of is, of course, the HIGHER SELF, the Atma, or ray of the Universal and ONE SELF, (*Key to Theosophy*, p. 175.) To become conscious thereof, to saturate therewith the "Inner Ego" (the union of the Spiritual and Intellectual natures,—the Buddhi-Manas), to make its influence dominant over the "Lower or Personal Ego" (the physical man and its carnal instincts),—this is the work before the aspirant after Emancipation.

Now this Higher Self, this Atma, is apart from a man and above him, and, because All-mighty and therefore potent in the internal battle against evil, is the one who can really secure victory. Hence, though the individual exerts every energy in the combat, the source of aspiration, inspiration, courage, endurance is the Higher Self, and so the reliance for success is not on the individual's strength, but on the limitless resources of the Higher Self. He is truly the warrior and the general. Yet, as the very object of all effort is complete union with him, he is not to be conceived of as a mere separate and supervisory power; rather is he the overshadowing and encompassing being, mergence with whom has begun and is to progress. Considering him in this double aspect, it is therefore possible for a man to fight and yet to let him do the fighting; to take and obey his orders, and yet not regard him as a distant general; to hearken to his words, and yet to see in them but the soul's deepest yearnings.

2d. As mergence with the Higher Self is at our stage but partial in either fact or consciousness, and will only be complete at "the day of the great peace," any realization of the union must of necessity be now imperfect. The less the sense of oneness, the stronger the conception of a distant generalship, but it is certainly a higher reach of spiritual vigor to obey a revered and trusted leader because obedience is right, than to effectuate

a personal wish for personal reasons, however proper the wish may be.

QUESTION LXXXV.

A is interested in Theosophy from a practical standpoint; B, intellectually. Which will make the more progress Theosophically? Or will each make equal progress on their respective but divergent lines, all other things being equal?

Ans.—This is one of the Questions which require the FORUM to disclaim authoritative teaching, or anything more than suggestions which must stand or fall on their own merit.

The contrast is between A, an active worker, and B, a student. Now as the essence of Theosophy is selflessness, altruistic devotion to human good without thought of reward, A would seem to have more of the *spirit* of Theosophy. But as Theosophy is also a science, or, rather, the inclusion of all science, B would seem to have more of its *facts*. Which, then, is the larger factor in progress, character or knowledge?

Now, as no possible accumulation of learning can evolve spirituality or benevolence, and as, on the other hand, the widest sympathy does not impart truths, B and A might appear equally far from the direct path to attainment. Yet there are considerations tending to show that A's route will approach that path and finally merge in it, while the same may not be true of B's. One may see this from an illustration in another field. Two youths are destined for the law. One pursues a liberal education, grounding himself in general culture, becoming acquainted with human nature as exhibited in history and ethics, giving to his mind a training in flexibility and power, but without as yet directly studying jurisprudence. The other enters a law-office and learns both legal text-books and the mechanism of practice. When the former reaches the law-office the latter is far ahead of him. But in time the former acquires the technical knowledge, all the better because of his broader range of thought and his already trained faculties, and he ultimately distances the latter as having really more "bottom." And so, one may justifiably think, the working Theosophist is

preparing a nature so accordant with the genius of Theosophy that, when the time comes for actual grasp of its intellectual treasures, he effects it with more thoroughness than the student who had, as years go, the advantage. The former has laid the broader foundation, acquired truer perception of the superstructure, and so will in the end be more stable, correct, and finished.

But this is not all. In any active Theosophic work, a work so active that much study is impracticable, there is, nevertheless, a constant association with Theosophic truths, a continual imbibing of their flavor if not their substance. In such atmosphere such a Theosophist lives, and he must absorb not a little of its nutritious content. It is hardly possible that he should not be learning all the while, even if not consciously studying.

Then there is another fact. We know that Theosophic work is that upon which the Masters are most intent and most engaged. It is reasonable to suppose that men of like thought and action in the same cause should come within Their vision and evoke Their sympathy. Now, while no one asserts of Them illegal interference or "miraculous" act, it is entirely possible that They give unseen help to Their humble co-workers just as one of the latter may give seen help to a beginner. And, if so, the boon may take the form of a new thought, or a quickened memory, or a livelier apprehension,—things less likely to a mere student because not so connected with Them by sympathy.

An active worker is therefore not only making progress in the higher life, but is almost necessarily making progress in intellectual knowledge of Theosophy. But the mere student, though gaining an intellectual knowledge of Theosophy, is not progressing in the higher life. Books and facts and information of laws and processes do nothing of themselves to make a man intuitive or unselfish. A is therefore advancing well on one line and somewhat on the other; B on one and not at all on the other. Hence A, one must think, gains more on the whole than B.

QUESTION LXXXVI.

Much information comes to me through meditation. May not such be fully as reliable as any obtained from books?

Ans.—A good deal was said about "Meditation" in the Answers to Question III, FORUM No. 2, and about its relation to books in those to Question V. There is no need to repeat this, but a thought or two may be added.

The information coming to you through meditation is probably of a different kind from that obtained from books. Meditation, at your present stage, discloses to you your own quality of mind, your special tendencies and weaknesses, the specific discipline you need and should attempt, and the modifications already worked in mental or moral habit. Also it gives greater cleanness and precision to the various truths you have learned, fits them together more accurately, and enables you to systematize your possessions. Thus as to your own nature and as to the relation of Theosophical doctrines you gain much by this practise. But it probably does not add largely to your amount of *objective* information, being rather an exercise upon material already on hand than an excursion after fresh. As yet the intuitional faculty, that which will later on be employed for acquisition of truth, exists but in germ, and the faculties actually in use have meditation as only one of their processes.

Information of the two kinds indicated cannot come from books. You must work it out for yourself. *Self-knowledge* no reading can impart, nor can anybody else arrange for you and classify the things you know. But beyond these two kinds you would be unsafe in trusting much to mere thought. Nothing is riskier than the evolution of facts out of consciousness.

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